



WASHTENAW
AUDUBON SOCIETY
NEWSLETTER

January / February 2022

76th Ann Arbor Christmas Bird Count Washtenaw County Birders 1 – Freezing Rain 0

Let me start this write-up with the proverbial elephant in the room: the weather on count day for the 76th Ann Arbor CBC was absolutely awful. The compiler for the nearby Monroe CBC, Jerry Jourdan, described it well when he called it “Miserable”. Starting around 4:30 a.m. freezing rain moved in over our circle and in spite of forecasts that it would change over to snow later that morning it kept going into early afternoon. Needless to say, this type of precipitation made for some seriously nasty conditions for field observers (see the photo at right), but it also greatly (negatively) affected bird activity for much of the day. Ugly though the weather may have been, it would take more than that to stop our dedicated cadre of volunteers!

And what a cadre we have. There were a record 109 field observers out there counting, aided by a near-record 35 feeder watchers. I previously highlighted this record participation in last year’s CBC article (in the March-April WAS newsletter), and this prior experience served us well to slot all of these volunteers into the eight count areas seamlessly. As was the case last year, credit for that is in large part due to the eight area leaders and the feeder watch coordinator, who allowed the process of assigning volunteers to go seamlessly. And because social distancing rules were still in effect, this large cohort of participants needed to spread out in small groups all over the circle.

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*An icy mess at the Ann Arbor Landfill
(Jacco Gelderloos)*

President's Letter

Dear Washtenaw Audubon members and friends,

As I reflect on the New Year, and as we approach the second full year of the COVID pandemic, my thoughts turn to how birding has helped me and so many others stay sane during the COVID pandemic. I have some thoughts about what birds and birding meant to me in 2020 and 2021 and going forward in 2022, as well as some of the things I am thankful for, as a birder and as your WAS president.

1. Birds give me a reason to get outside for a walk every day.
2. Birds bring delight to my senses and raise my mood and spirits.
3. Birding gives me a chance to see and talk with our enthusiastic members and fellow birders, despite the pandemic, on field trips and at the next good bird.
4. Being out looking for birds gives me the chance to thank our wonderful and supportive WAS Members and Board often, and with my whole heart, for supporting WAS and caring about birds and conservation.
5. Birding locally lets me stay safe, stay mindful of my fossil fuel consumption, and brings me to my old favorite birding hotspots.
6. Supporting Young Birders and efforts to get more kids involved in birding gives me hope for the future of our planet.
7. Being part of WAS gives me the chance to continue Washtenaw Audubon Society's work to help our organization become more inclusive, equitable and diverse in all ways, and to welcome BIPOC birders, birders with different abilities, birders of all ages, genders and religions, LGBTQ birders, and anyone interested in enjoying birds and nature with us, without regard to any status.
8. I'm thankful that birding is my primary hobby, and is usually safely done outdoors, and not an activity that must be done indoors, like bowling or indoor sports, or bridge, which have been difficult to participate in during COVID.
9. Birding with eBird mobile helps me contribute to community science as well as keeping track of my personal lists.
10. Birds are what connects the birding community, for the benefit of both. I'm all about connection, so this last point is a huge boost for me and many others.

Please enjoy this issue of the Washtenaw Audubon Society Newsletter, thanks to our creative Newsletter Editor, Jacco Gelderloos, and other contributors. Our field trips have resumed and continue even throughout the winter, thanks to our dedicated Field Trip Chair, Matthew Spoor. Our programs continued in hybrid form last fall, and now virtually again, on Zoom, thanks to the creativity of our Vice-President and Program Chair, Mike Sefton, and our Zoom expert and Secretary, Jessica Adamczyk and other techie consultants. We will resume in-person programs when COVID numbers fall again. Thanks to all WAS members for your support during this difficult time, and to the new members who have joined us during the pandemic. Your enthusiasm means the world to us and to the birds. Many thanks to new Membership Chair, Diana Miller, for volunteering to take on this role during these challenging times. I know we'll all enjoy getting to know her better!

I hope to see you at a local frozen pond, with a diverse concentration of ducks in the small amount of remaining open water.

As always, I am for the birds,

Juliet Berger, President

Washtenaw Audubon Society

Presenter Dave Dister (and a sloth) at the November program (Mike Sefton)



Not only did this add a degree of safety for everyone, but we again greatly improved the coverage of the count circle: more people in smaller groups meant more territory covered in more detail.

So, observer numbers and density matched last year, but the weather was nowhere like 2020's. Other conditions were rather similar, however, with little to no snow cover and all bodies of water open. How then, were the variety and numbers of birds affected?

With open water all around, we found a very respectable 15 species of waterfowl on count day, plus four more during count week. The aftermath of an owling foray into Avis Farms turned up the only Cackling Goose of the day; a repeat visit later in the day failed to relocate that bird. After last year's record tally, Canada Geese were some 34% below their recent 10-year average. Swans were a mixed bag: a near record-high for Mutes, well below average for Trumpeters. Since both Canada Geese and Trumpeter Swans regularly feed in cornfields surrounding Ann Arbor (and use smaller bodies of water than Mute Swans), both of these species may well have been in areas farther afield.

Wood Ducks had a banner year: eight birds is nearly six times the recent average. A lingering Northern Shoveler was only the fourth since 2010; the count week Green-winged Teal the fifth. Both Mallard and American Black Ducks both fit the Canada Goose pattern, each numbering some 40% below average. We repeated last year's noteworthy "*aythya*" trifecta, with a count day Redhead and count week Ring-necked Ducks and a Lesser Scaup. Similarly, we found all three merganser species for the second year running as well. With lots of open water around, both Hooded and Common posted 55% above average, whereas Red-breasted, always the rarer of the three, was found only during count week. A Ruddy Duck at the Ann Arbor Landfill made for an unexpected surprise.

Only one Ring-necked Pheasant was found, contrasted by another 350+ tally for Wild Turkey. It appears that these kinds of numbers can likely be expected in the years to come – what an amazing success story this formerly (nearly) extirpated species is! Another recovering species, the Sandhill Crane, greatly benefitted from the mild weather leading up to count day: half of the count areas reported a total of 149 birds, the second highest ever. Pied-billed Grebe is now essentially annual on our count, but four birds were nearly double the average, likely courtesy of the large amount of open water. In light of that, only one American Coot was a bit odd – perhaps larger numbers were still farther to our north? Good numbers of the two regular gull species were still around; Herring Gulls had a particularly good year over double their recent average. Open water was good for Belted Kingfishers (28% above average), but it was great for Great Blue Herons, who posted a record high tally of 23 (over double the average).

Both daytime and nocturnal raptors were quite hard to come by. Rain, let alone the freezing variety, tends to suppress their activity to a significant degree. For example, only during count week was a Turkey Vulture observed, in spite of conditions having been quite conducive for them to linger in the weeks leading up to the count. Similarly, Sharp-shinned Hawk was a count week only species; 20 Cooper's Hawks were exactly half of last year's record high count. Although Bald Eagles had an ok showing with 7 birds, that was far shy of the double-digit tallies from both 2019 and 2020. Posting the lowest number since 2009, 63 Red-tailed Hawks was nearly half of that species's 2020 record high tally. Finding a Red-shouldered Hawk is always a treat, so the one seen at the Whitmore Lake Preserve was most welcome.



Barred Owl in an icy tree along the Matthaei Botanical Gardens Trail (Victor Chen)

Owl numbers were affected even more than diurnal raptors' – not only do these birds hate rain, the noise of the precipitation made it nearly impossible to hear those brave owls that did venture out in the brief periods when the rain let up. No wonder then, that both Eastern Screech- and Great Horned Owls were both some 50% below average. That said, for the first time since 2016 four owl species were found – two Barred Owls in separate locations and a Northern Saw-whet Owl at Marshall Park were very welcome in a year where owls were always going to be a challenge. Rounding out the raptor category, we managed the falcon trifecta – this was the seventh year in a row, even if numbers for each species were low (2 Kestrels, 1 Merlin, and 1 Peregrine).

Woodpeckers were never going to repeat 2020's outrageous showing of 708 birds, but the six species's collective tally of 508 still managed the second highest tally ever. Star of the show were four Red-headed Woodpeckers (3 at Independence

Lake, near Dexter), which made for the highest count since 1980 (!) and was only the third record since 2010. Continuing the theme of iconic species on the rebound, Pileated Woodpeckers once again hit double digits (fifth year in a row) and were, once again, found in each of the eight count areas. It appears this is the very exciting new normal for these magnificent birds.

Although they are (by far) the toughest of tyrannid flycatchers, a count week Eastern Phoebe might well represent a climate change related phenomenon. First found in 2015, this year's bird made for the third record in seven years. Both

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The Washtenaw Audubon Society is an active chapter of Michigan Audubon formed in the early 1950s. Monthly programs feature guest speakers on a wide variety of natural history and birding topics. We conduct field trips to places in Ann Arbor, Washtenaw County, and beyond.

American Crows and Blue Jays posted tallies of 23% and 49% above average, respectively, so the bad weather did not appear to have affected them too badly. Open country passerines were limited to a paltry three Horned Larks.

Indicative of heavy coverage in the field and at feeders, numbers for all of the small, mostly insectivorous species were well above average (if not record-breaking). In short, Black-capped Chickadees (+9%), Tufted Titmouse (+11%), and White-breasted Nuthatch (+8%) were quite easy to come by. Perhaps an echo of last year's irruption, 41 Red-breasted Nuthatches were an impressive total. It seems that Brown Creepers are becoming a more common wintering species locally; this year was the fifth year in a row we recorded double-digit numbers and the 8th time in the past ten years.

Winter Wrens nearly tied their high count from 2019 and 2020, but numbers for their cousin, the Carolina Wren, dropped 57% compared to last year. Still, 70 of these feisty little birds made for their second highest count ever. After a few lean years, Golden-crowned Kinglets rebounded a little and were present in numbers some 9% above the recent 10-year average. The Yellow-rumped Warblers at Independence Lake on 12/16 could not be relocated on count day, but still made our list as a count week species.

By and large, species in the thrush-like group had an above-average year, although none of them came close to the banner year results of 2020. Five Hermit Thrushes was a very respectable total, likely related to the mild weather up until count day. American Robin and Cedar Waxwing dropped off a lot compared to last year (how could they not!), but still had very decent showings. 10,000+ European Starlings is an impressive total in any year. Highlight in this category was a Gray Catbird, only the fourth since 2000 – perhaps these semi-hardy mimids will become more common on our count as the climate starts to allow them to spend winters farther and farther north.

Finding five finch species on an Ann Arbor CBC is not all that common – the 2021 CBC was only the fifth time since 2000 it happened. Interestingly, House Finches were 11% below average, while American Goldfinches 21% above average. Much like these two expected species, the three rarer species also made for a show in contrasts: four Purple Finches was the highest since 2005, but two Pine Siskins was some 97% below the recent average! Always a treat, four Common Redpolls were a great find.

Not including House Sparrows, eight sparrow species were recorded on our count, which is right about on the mark for the past several years. Much like in 2020, American Tree Sparrow (-10%) was the odd one out. A count week Chipping Sparrow at Barton Nature Area was the fourth record since 2010 and may be an indication of it becoming a more regularly wintering species as well. Two Fox Sparrows doubled 2020's tally. 59 Song Sparrows bested last year's impressive count and reset the mark for the highest tally since 1983. Seven Swamp Sparrows made for a very respectable showing, far above the recent average (+169%). Likewise, 150+ White-throated Sparrows was well over double the recent average of 68. Once again, two White-crowned Sparrows frequented a feeder off Waters Rd. After a close brush with a record-high tally last year, in 2021 Dark-eyed Juncos obliterated the mark and posted an amazing total of 1,010 birds! Among these visitors from up north was a bird that initially appeared to be an "Oregon" Junco, but it was later identified as one representing the intermediate *cismontanus* group, an apparent first for our CBC.



Dark-eyed Junco (subsp. cismontanus), near Whitmore Lake (Jocelyn Anderson)

Now essentially annual on our count (since 2009) a lone Brown-headed Cowbird attended a feeder in area 3. A trio of Rusty Blackbird (1 male, 2 females) was found at the Ann Arbor Airport when some members of the group counting there wandered into a section of flooded brush and came across them. This was only the fourth record since 2010 for this declining species. As an aside, we have now recorded at least two species of blackbird on each of the last nine CBCs!

Much like the 75th running of the Ann Arbor Christmas Bird Count, the 76th edition featured record levels of participation, at levels nearly double those of the “before time”. For the second year running, there were over a hundred field observers (109), and well over 30 feeder watchers (35), likely making our circle the most well-covered in the state! Much like in 2020, it took some doing to accommodate everyone, but with last year’s experience under our belts we were once again successful in doing so. Without question what stood out this year was the perseverance of our participants who not only came out to bird in the morning, but, much more impressively, persevered for the rest of the day. Thank, you all. Thank you very much. The Ann Arbor CBC couldn’t be what it is without you!

Even if it was almost 15,000 birds under last year’s tally, the 37,306 individual birds we found was still 21% (!) above the 2011-2020 average. Two species with record high tallies was more in line with “normal” years, but with the continued high coverage level I think the weather was a major contributing factor in limiting the number of such high counts. The awful weather notwithstanding, we tied the 2020 record high of 76 species on count day and added nine more species during count week, for a combined 85 species. In short, we got very close to tying last year’s 87 species record total and broke the 80-species mark for the second year in a row. I believe it is safe to say that the increased coverage provided by the 140+ observers deserves credit for that!

As most of you know, our CBC effort does not happen in a vacuum. This community science contributes to an ever-expanding database of the winter distribution for birds in the (mostly) Western Hemisphere and aides scientists in determining trends, patterns, and policy to help protect them. This dataset is publicly accessible and makes for a wonderful rabbit’s hole to venture down – check it out on the NAS website: <https://www.audubon.org/conservation/science/christmas-bird-count>.

For 2022, we are planning on making a few changes to our CBC. At the least, the main checklist (the so-called bread-and-butter species) will be updated and the circle’s maps will be improved and made more interactive. Hopefully, this will help facilitate the running of our count and aide observers in the field with determining whether or not they are still in the circle or the area they are counting in. More to come, then!

In closing, I would like to quote myself from last year’s summary article: “I cannot stress how grateful I am to have such an amazing contingent of birders at “my” disposal – the hard work of area leaders, field observers, feeder watchers, and all other CBC volunteers makes my job much, MUCH easier, not to mention rewarding. This year probably provided the best example of how we all collaborate to make our count work and turn out an amazing effort even under the most challenging of circumstances – thank you all!” If anything, this year that statement holds even more truth – not only did we handle the challenge of a large number of volunteers, but we also faced and overcame horrendous weather conditions to turn out an amazing CBC result. Kudos to you all – THANK YOU! With that, I hope to see you all out there for the 2022 edition, on December 17, 2022 – make sure to mark your calendars, folks!

Cackling Goose	1 (US)	Turkey Vulture	CW (US)	Brown Creeper	16
Canada Goose	2,561	accipiter sp.	1	Winter Wren	3
Mute Swan	81	Sharp-shinned Hawk	CW	Carolina Wren	70
Trumpeter Swan	14	Cooper’s Hawk	20	Golden-crowned Kinglet	17
Wood Duck	8	Bald Eagle	7	Eastern Bluebird	173
Northern Shoveler	1 (US)	Red-shouldered Hawk	1	Hermit Thrush	5
Gadwall	22	Red-tailed Hawk	63	American Robin	941
Mallard	725	Eastern Screech-Owl	13	Gray Catbird	1 (US)
American Black Duck	7	Great Horned Owl	7	European Starling	10,458
Green-winged Teal	CW (US)	Barred Owl	2 (US)	Cedar Waxwing	90
Redhead	1 (US)	Northern Saw-whet Owl	1 (US)	House Sparrow	793
Ring-necked Duck	CW (US)	Belted Kingfisher	11	House Finch	353
Lesser Scaup	CW (US)	woodpecker sp.	5	Purple Finch	4 (US)
Bufflehead	33	Red-headed Woodpecker	4 (US)	Common Redpoll	4 (US)
Common Goldeneye	22	Red-bellied Woodpecker	226	Pine Siskin	2
Hooded Merganser	58	Downy Woodpecker	208	American Goldfinch	619
Common Merganser	48	Hairy Woodpecker	52	sparrow sp.	21
Red-breasted Merganser	CW (US)	Northern Flicker	33	American Tree Sparrow	317
Ruddy Duck	1 (US)	Pileated Woodpecker	10	Chipping Sparrow	0
Ring-necked Pheasant	1	American Kestrel	2	Fox Sparrow	2
Wild Turkey	359	Merlin	1	Song Sparrow	59
Pied-billed Grebe	4	Peregrine Falcon	1	Swamp Sparrow	7
Rock Pigeon	735	Eastern Phoebe	CW (US)	White-throated Sparrow	151
Mourning Dove	576	Blue Jay	629	White-crowned Sparrow	2 (US)
American Coot	1 (US)	American Crow	13,300	Dark-eyed Junco	1,079 (HC)
Sandhill Crane	149	Horned Lark	3	Brown-headed Cowbird	1
gull sp.	7	Black-capped Chickadee	723	Rusty Blackbird	3 (US)
Ring-billed Gull	155	Tufted Titmouse	282	Yellow-rumped Warbler	CW (US)
Herring Gull	17	Red-breasted Nuthatch	41	Northern Cardinal	558
Great Blue Heron	23 (HC)	White-breasted Nuthatch	301		
				Total Individuals	37,306
CW = count week only		HC = high count		US = unusual species	

Field Trip Schedule

- January 23, 2022** **Weekend Walk for Birds at Matthaei Botanical Gardens** **8:00 am – 10:30 am**
Exploring the winter woods, water, and prairie of Matthaei is always a rewarding experience. Please join us as we search for everything from bluebirds to hawks along Fleming Creek. Meet at the steps to the conservatory. Matthaei members park for free with metered parking for everyone else. Leaders: Juliet Berger & Matthew Spoor
- February 6, 2022** **Weekend Walk for Birds at Ford Lake** **8:00 am – 10:30 am**
Ford Lake and its boardwalk provide one of the best winter birding opportunities in Washtenaw County. There have been 76 species seen in February at Ford Lake and we look forward to seeing a variety of waterfowl, gulls, and local winter birds. Meet at the parking lot off South Grove Street, which is located south of I-94 at the northeast corner of Ford Lake, across from the Citgo Station at the intersection of Service Drive and South Grove St. Leader: Juliet Berger & Matthew Spoor
- February 12, 2022** **BIPOC Bird Walk at Gallup Park** **9:00 am – 11:00 am**
We invite all people from the BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) community to join us on this walk. Together, we welcome people who are open-minded, welcoming, generous of spirit, and want to enjoy our winged friends outdoors. We also welcome our white allies on this walk who embrace the BIPOC community. All ages and skill levels are invited. We will have extra binoculars if you do not have any. Park in the first parking lot after crossing the one-lane wooden bridge (on the south side of the river). We will start at the playground along the path near the wooden bridge.
- 2/19/22 & 2/20/22** **Birding the Upper Peninsula**
We are reviving this fan favorite for 2022. We will travel to Sault Ste. Marie on Friday, February 18th, and bird all day Saturday and Sunday morning. Target birds include: Northern Hawk Owl, Great Gray Owl, Snowy Owl, Red and White-winged Crossbills, Ruffed and Sharp-tailed Grouse, Purple Finch, Snow Bunting, and more. Maybe the heavens will align for a Spruce Grouse lifer for your trip leader. Space is limited to 20 and Washtenaw Audubon membership is required. Lodging information and other logistical details will be shared after registration. Trip Leaders: Juliet Berger & Matthew Spoor
- February 26, 2022** **Weekend Walk for Birds at Nichols Arboretum** **8:00 am – 10:30 am**
The Arb, with 165 species reported to eBird, is the number one hotspot for birds in the county. The diversity of habitat provides opportunities to discover a wide variety of species. Join us as we explore this local gem. Meet at the east end of the arboretum at the Dow Prairie entrance. From Geddes Ave., turn north onto Riverview Dr. and stay right until it terminates at Riverview Ct. cul-de-sac. Leader: Matthew Spoor
- March 12, 2022** **One Road Challenge** **12:00 am**
This is a friendly team birding competition where teams pick one road in the county to see how many birds they can see in a morning along that road. If you have a team, great. If not, that's OK too; register and we will help set you up with a team. [More details and competition rules can be found here.](#) Everyone is welcome to join the teams for lunch and tally rally at 11:30 AM at the Alpha Diner ([map here](#)). We will switch to Zoom if Washtenaw County COVID Community Transmission level is above moderate as defined by the CDC. We will assess things one week from the event and communicate plans with registrants at that time. No need to participate in the event to join us for lunch.
- March 25, 2022** **Woodcock Walk at Barton Nature Area** **7:30 pm – 8:30 pm**
If you have never witnessed the display of the American Woodcock, you should join us for this event. Meet at the Barton Nature Area parking lot off of Huron River Drive, 250 feet north of Bird Rd. Leaders: Ray Stocking
- March 31 – May 26, 2022** **Spring Migration Thursdays at the Arb** **8:00 am – 10:30 am**
Join us at Nichols Arboretum Thursday mornings (March 31st through May 26th) to observe migrants making their way north. These leaderless walks are a great opportunity to join with other birders of all skill levels. Meet at the east end of the arboretum at the Dow Prairie entrance. From Geddes Ave., turn north onto Riverview Dr. and stay right until it terminates at Riverview Ct. cul-de-sac.

Workdays at the Searles Preserve

- February 6, 2022 and March 6, 2022** **1:00 pm – 3:00 pm**
Please join us on the 1st Sundays of the month in February and March for Stewardship Workdays at the Searles Preserve. We'll work on environmental restoration from 1-3pm Feb. 6th and March 6th. Please dress for the weather and bring leather gloves and handsaws, chainsaws, or loppers. We'll be out rain, snow, or sun! If you don't have tools and gloves, we'll have some extras for you. We will conclude with a short nature walk so you can learn more about this 48 acre property. Meet at the Bolla Rd entrance between E Willis Rd and Stony Creek Rd.

November-December 2021: Fall & Early Winter Highlights

The Highlights

The last couple of months are not generally the time of year for wood warblers to feature prominently in this article, but 2021 broke that trend. From November 2-4, a lingering **Wilson's Warbler** brightened the days of numerous birders visiting Nichols Arboretum, as it showed off its dapper little self. There are only seven or so Nov-Dec records for this species in Michigan, so this bird was a State-wide rarity.

Even more surprising was a relative of the aforementioned species that appeared at a feeding station on Ann Arbor's southwest side. Interestingly, this bird was identified with certainty only after the property owner that was hosting it posted a picture online asking what this little bird coming to her feeder was: Michigan's third December record for **Northern Parula**! Unfortunately, it turned out to be a one-day wonder, in spite of diligent feeder watching by the homeowner.



Wilson's Warbler *Cardellina pusilla*, Nichols Arboretum, November 4 2021 (Marilynn Thomas)



Northern Parula *Setophaga americana*, Bay Hill Ct, December 4 2021 (Jennifer Ayala)

Waterfowl through Shorebirds

The Pierce Lake **Snow Goose** found at the end of October apparently moved a little south, where it hung out with a mixed flock of Canada Geese and Sandhill Cranes through 12/5. Another white morph was found at Mill Pond Park on 12/20, but its stay lasted a mere day. **Cackling Geese** had an outstanding season with as many as eight different reports. Ford Lake in Milan hosted flocks of four (11/14 – 11/20) and five birds (12/9); Independence Lake bested those tallies with a group of seven on 12/10. Apart from these three cases, onesies and twosies were mixed in with the large groups of Canada Geese present in the County. Four reports for **Tundra Swans** all concerned fly-over groups, ranging from 10 to 80 birds – these swans passed overhead from 11/24 through 12/11.



Snow Goose *Anser caerulescens*, Mill Pond Park, December 20 2021 (Cynthia Weber)



Cackling Goose *Branta hutchinsii*, Airport Blvd, November 2 2021 (Karen Markey)

The last **Blue-winged Teal** to depart our area was a group of three at the Meyer Preserve on 11/3. A few **American Wigeon** stuck around until mid-November; a little more unexpected was a quartet at Hewen's Creek Park from 12/3 – 12/4. Perhaps a

little hardier than the two preceding species, **Northern Pintails** were found at nine locations throughout the period, with as many as 15 at Four Mile Lake on 12/20. Similarly, a few **Green-winged Teal** seem to have opted to hang around courtesy of the mild fall weather; 27 birds at Olson Park on 11/17 was by far the largest gathering of this small dabbling duck.

Since they migrate south a little after the bulk of the dabbling duck species, late fall is the expected time for most diving ducks to appear in our area. Always a tricky identification conundrum, **Greater Scaup** were found on Pleasant Lake (16 birds on 11/18) and Portage Lake (two on 12/12). Rather out of place was a female **Long-tailed Duck** at the Meyer Preserve (11/3 – 11/12); normally, this species shows up at the County's larger, deeper lakes, not the small, shallow pond where it stayed for over a week. Small numbers of **Red-breasted Mergansers** were found at four lakes, first appearing at Portage Lake on 11/14; courtesy of the open water in these lakes, many stayed well into December.



Green-winged Teal *Anas crecca*, North Hydro Park, December 8 2021 (Bill Nolting)



Long-tailed Duck *Clangula hyemalis*, Meyer Preserve, November 3 2021 (Bill VanderMolen)

Single **Ring-necked Pheasants** were observed at a rather paltry six locations this period. **Horned Grebe** reports came in from five sites (11/16 – 12/7), with a maximum of four birds at Portage Lake on 11/28. **American Coots** seemed quite widespread during the period, although no large groups were present; nine locations hosted at most five birds. As it is one of the hardier shorebird species, it was perhaps unsurprising that a couple of **Killdeer** stayed as late as mid-December: one was at Mary Beth Doyle Park (12/10), another along Vreeland Rd (12/13). Much more retiring in nature, two **American Woodcocks** were still around into November, with a bird near Platt & Morgan (11/4) and another in Lodi Township (11/14). Rounding out the shorebirds, a **Greater Yellowlegs** joined the geese along M52 on 11/3, and two more spent nearly a week along Vreeland Rd (11/9 – 11/13).



Killdeer *Charadrius vociferus*, Mary Beth Doyle Park, December 10 2021 (Bill Nolting)



Greater Yellowlegs *Tringa melanoleuca*, Vreeland Rd, November 10 2021 (Bill VanderMolen)

Gulls through Woodpeckers

Wintertime is rare gull time, and a good amount and variety of *larid* treasure graced Washtenaw County during November-December. Most widespread and numerous were **Lesser Black-back Gulls**: as many as three birds were at Whitmore Lake (11/17 – 12/16), one, possibly two birds hung out at North Bay Park (12/8 – 12/17), two were in a gull flock on a driving range along Earhart (12/11), and at least one more was at the Salem Township Landfill (12/21 – 12/24). That last site also hosted up to three

Glaucous Gulls, two first-winter birds and an adult. Not surprisingly, two **Great Black-backed Gulls** joined the frenzy at this renowned gulling location (12/21 – 12/30). Almost expected were two more at North Bay Park (12/20 – 12/29); away from the landfill, this location is by far the most reliable for finding the world's largest gull species in Washtenaw County.

Oddly, only two **Common Loons** were reported throughout the period: one was on Whitmore Lake (11/6 – 11/19), the other on Portage Lake (11/14). Although this species tends to be more common in spring, two birds seemed awfully paltry. **Double-crested Cormorants** had moved out by 11/26, with a distinct shift in distribution in a down-stream direction of the Huron River (towards Lake Erie, where this species winters in good numbers). Not waiting to see if the weather would continue to be mild, 11/1 was the last day **Great Egrets** were reported: one at Barton Nature Area, another one at North Bay Park. A bit of a shock find, and making for one of a mere handful of local November records, was the **Cattle Egret** that hung out with, you guessed it, a herd of cattle in the Frains Lake/Ford Rd area on 11/1 – it was not found on the following days. The first local December record for **Black-crowned Night-Heron** was a juvenile at this species's local hotspot, Mary Beth Doyle Park, on 12/3.



Glaucous Gull *Larus hyperboreus*, Salem Twp Landfill, December 22 2021 (Ben Lucking)



Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*, Frains Lake Rd, November 1 2021 (Victor Chen)

Somewhat unexpectedly given the mild weather, 'only' two reports for **Turkey Vulture** showed up on eBird during December. Recent increases in winter occurrence might have led one to believe this species would have been more common in 2021. A (very) late **Osprey** was seen over Whitmore Lake on 11/14; perhaps continued population increases will make Ospreys in November more common in the years to come. Mid-November was the time for the last of the **Golden Eagles** to migrate through; an adult and an immature passed over the Torrey Rd hawk watch (11/11) and another bird was seen over Fleming Rd (11/15). Although rather widely observed (10 locations in all), three **Red-shouldered Hawks** over Torrey Rd on 11/10 surely was a nice find. Their congener from the far north, **Rough-legged Hawk**, was much rarer: one in the Vreeland & Gotfredson area (11/2 – 11/7 and 11/27 – 12/30) was more or less expected, but the one along M14 near Joy (11/15) must have been an unexpected surprise.



Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos*, Torrey Rd Hawkwatch, November 11 2021 (Bill VanderMolen)



Rough-legged Hawk *Buteo lagopus*, Vreeland Rd, November 30 2021 (Bill Nolting)

Owls showed up in excellent variety this fall/early winter. Likely the highlight in this category was the **Snowy Owl** that was found on 12/9 along Gotfredson Rd, near the Vreeland intersection. Many local birders enjoyed this bird as it perched either on one of utility poles lining the road or in the field just east of the intersection. Unfortunately, an overzealous photographer trespassed into the field, flushed the bird, and spoiled this rare occurrence for many others (not to mention he broke the law). It seems this bird then moved on to Willow Run Airport in nearby Wayne County, before it reappeared at Vreeland & Gotfredson from 12/21 – 12/26. It is no news that **Barred Owls** are spreading from the western townships into woodlots farther east; three reports each for November and December came in for this species, several of them from around Ann Arbor, showing that they are establishing themselves there. **Short-eared Owls** returned to the fallow fields at Vreeland & Gotfredson for another winter season; there were as many as five birds there on 11/3. Rather more secretive than the preceding three species, Northern Saw-whet Owls were at Vreeland & Gotfredson (11/6) and Marshall Park (12/18).



Snowy Owl *Bubo scandiacus*, Vreeland & Gotfredson, December 9 2021 (Bonnie Penet)



Red-headed Woodpecker *Melanerpes erythrocephalus*, Independence Lake, November 6 2021 (Mark Law)

Small numbers of **Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers** remained in the area through the end of the year; they were found at a pretty impressive nine locations in all. More unusual this late into the year, **Red-headed Woodpeckers** stuck around in as many as seven sites, most notably at Independence Lake, where a family group of five birds put on quite the show for visitors.

Passerines: Flycatchers through Finches

We all know that **Eastern Phoebes** are tough little flycatchers that remain in our area well past the migration window of their fellow *tyrannids*, so the four reports into early November were not too terribly out of the ordinary. That said, the birds that turned up in Hudson Mills Metropark (12/20) and the Foster Nature Area (12/29 -12/31) were quite unusual and added to a growing number of recent December records locally. Starting in December 2018, there have now been six cases for the county, leading one to wonder if climate change will allow Phoebes to become a regular part of the local winter avifauna. Establishing what appears to be the first ever November record in Washtenaw County for the species, a very tardy **Blue-headed Vireo** was found on private property on 11/6.



Eastern Phoebe *Sayornis phoebe*, Foster Nature Area, December 29 2021 (Mark Law)



Ruby-crowned Kinglet *Corthylio calendula*, Nichols Arboretum, November 4 2021 (Marilynn Thomas)

More seasonably appropriate were the two **Northern Shrikes** located during December: along Gotfredson Rd (12/2) and at M52 & Boyce (12/17). Often rather slow in leaving our area, quite a few **Ruby-crowned Kinglets** stayed past the end of November, with individuals at North Bay Park (12/4), Gallup Park (12/8), Argo Nature Area (12/10), and Foster Nature Area (12/31). Similarly hardy as the kinglet, **Winter Wrens** were quite widespread and numerous; they were found in a dozen or so sites, with several of them hosting two birds. The last **Marsh Wren** left the LeFurge Woods cattails as of 11/7. There were no **Northern Mockingbirds** away from their stronghold in the Manchester area; a few individuals persevered well into December. Only a very small number of **American Pipits** moved through this fall and did so in an incredibly narrow window from 11/9 – 11/11. A handful of **Purple Finches** arrived in our area in November, but most of these apparently moved on; by the time December rolled around they were present at two sites only. With the exception of an early scout in Lodi Twp on 12/3, **Common Redpolls** started arriving after 12/18, with the bulk of the birds in the Barton area, where numbers built up to some 20 birds. Normally the most common of the winter finches, **Pine Siskins** were quite hard to come by: reports came in from only seven locations, with a maximum of five birds at Nichols Arboretum on 11/5.

Passerines: Longspurs through Wood-Warblers

Harbingers of winter weather, **Lapland Longspurs** showed up right on cue over the fields at Vreeland & Gotfredson on 12/13, when a flock of 35 was observed. Not one, but two **Chipping Sparrows** stayed well into December: one bird attended a feeder along Tubbs Rd throughout November and December, another was seen and recorded at the Barton Nature Area on 12/16. By then its congener, the **Field Sparrow**, had long vacated Washtenaw County – the last report for this handsome little sparrow dated back to 11/9. Fascinatingly, 12/18 was apparently THE day to go look for December **Fox Sparrows** – a whopping four individuals were found on that day! Coincidentally, this also happened to be the date of the Ann Arbor CBC and several of these birds found their way onto the CBC tally sheet. Nowhere near as common as the closely related White-throated Sparrow, **White-crowned Sparrows** were still quite widespread: reports of as many as three birds came in from more than ten sites throughout the period. No **Eastern Towhees** stayed into December; the last of the three November birds left as of 11/27.



Chipping Sparrow *Spizella passerina*, Tubbs Rd, December 25 2021 (Maggie Jewett)



Field Sparrow *Spizella pusilla*, Oakwoods Nature Area, November 9 2021 (Yvonne Burch-Hartley)

One **Eastern Meadowlark** was still along Vreeland Rd by 11/3; none were reported after that. A species whose population has dropped precipitously over the past decades it was good to note decent numbers (up to 22 in one flock) of migrating **Rusty Blackbirds** throughout November. A lingering trio of two females and a male was a wonderful surprise at the Ann Arbor Airport on 12/18.

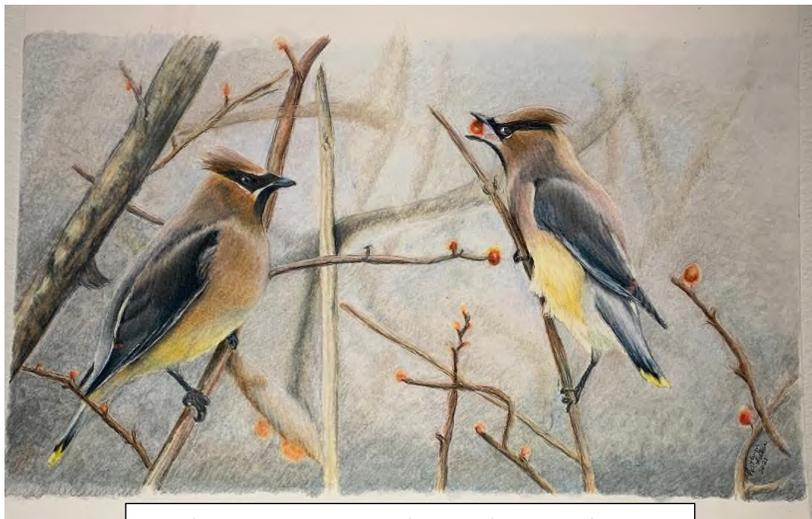
In addition to providing the period highlights, wood-warblers provided additional joy during the final two months of 2021. A **Nashville Warbler** lingered in Lodi Township until 11/9, making for another first local November record! Not quite as unusual, but still noteworthy, was a **Common Yellowthroat** at the marsh along Grass Lake Rd on 11/2. Courtesy of coverage for the Clinton CBC, only the second ever December **Pine Warbler** was seen and recorded at Chi-Bro Park in downtown Manchester. Arguably the least unusual of late fall/winter *parulids*, but still a treat this time of year, **Yellow-rumped Warblers** were well-represented locally: more than ten sites hosted these tough little birds, with a maximum of three birds at Independence Lake on 12/16.



Rusty Blackbird *Euphagus carolinus*, Pierce Lake, November 4 2021 (Michael Bowen)



Yellow-rumped Warbler *Setophaga coronata*, Independence Lake, December 15 2021 (Juliet Berger)



Cedar Waxwing Art by Kathryn Luker

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

The birds Washtenaw Audubon pledges to protect differ in color, size, behavior, geographical preference, and countless other ways. As we honor and celebrate the equally remarkable diversity of the human species, Washtenaw Audubon considers the work of inclusion, diversity, and equity a top priority moving forward. We hope that, in doing so, we can bring creativity and energy to our work in Washtenaw County and beyond for birds and people alike.



[Read our full statement at washtenawaudubon.org](http://washtenawaudubon.org)

To become a member of Washtenaw Audubon Society, please complete the form below (or a copy) and mail it with a check or money order payable to **Washtenaw Audubon Society—WAS Membership, P.O. Box 130923, Ann Arbor, MI 48113.**

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We encourage you to join at a lower rate if the suggested rates would otherwise preclude your membership, or at a higher rate if you possess the means. **Note:** WAS will only use your email address to communicate with you about WAS programs, field trips, or matters of interest to you, such as membership renewal and emailed WAS newsletters (in color!). We will not give your email address to anyone else.

WAS Monthly Programs

Washtenaw Audubon's in-person programs at the Botanical Gardens are on hold until the University allows gatherings to take place. To view our online Zoom programs, you will need access to an internet-capable computer, phone, or similar device. An announcement of the web address to view the program will be on our web site, Facebook page, and on the Birders email list a few days before the program. We may also add more online programs for April and the future, which will be announced on the same internet platforms.

February 16, 7:30 p.m. Migration Stopover Discovered for Threatened Shorebirds - with Andy Johnson

Join Andy Johnson from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology for a program on the recently discovered migration stopover site for threatened Whimbrels, one of the fastest declining shorebird species. The 20,000 Whimbrels using this site at night is the largest known gathering anywhere and is of critical importance to the survival of this species.

Andy Johnson grew up in Ann Arbor and was one of Washtenaw Audubon's best young birders when he was in high school. He graduated from Cornell and is now a multimedia producer for the Lab. He helped document the Whimbrel stopover site in South Carolina with photographs and video and will show us some of his work in this program.

March 16, 7:30 p.m. Birds of the Southwest – with Keith Dickey

Join Keith Dickey for a program on some of the fabulous birds of the American Southwest. Keith has birded various parts of the region including southeast Arizona, New Mexico, and central Texas, and will have photos of such interesting birds as the Phainopepla, Gambel's Quail, Harris's Hawk, Greater Roadrunner, Verdin, Costa's Hummingbird, Acorn Woodpecker, Golden-fronted Woodpecker, Vermilion Flycatcher, Green Jay, Mountain Chickadee, Cactus Wren, Golden-cheeked Warbler, Pyrrhuloxia, and White-faced Ibis. Keith Dickey is an avid birder and photographer and is Washtenaw Audubon's treasure.

Both of these events will only be available via Zoom:

Join Zoom Meeting: <https://umich.zoom.us/j/99959530793>

Meeting ID: 999 5953 0793

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